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SUBJECT: ELECTIONS, KANDAHAR AND KARZAI

Classified By: Ambassador Karl W. Eikenberry for Reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Begin Summary. In a frank discussion, Canadian Ambassador Crosbie explained to Ambassador Eikenberry that getting the electoral process right is a bottom-line position for Canada, and said we must be prepared for confrontation with Karzai on this issue, or risk losing credibility among our own population if we go along with a rigged election. While accepting the need to seek electoral reform Ambassador Eikenberry cautioned that despite private statements, Afghans will not support a dominant international role, and that if we dig ourselves deeper into Afghan politics, we'll entrench ourselves deeper into the country with fewer options. They also agreed that it would make sense to restructure the reporting relationship of the Kandahar PRT to have it report directly to Regional Command-South rather than the Canadian-led Task Force Kandahar to ensure coherence and integration of all civilians in Kandahar. They agreed that the jury is still out on whether current coalition efforts in the South will work, but if Karzai becomes more confident and the government has the space to focus on sustainable national governance, there will be progress. End Summary.

Electoral Reform

¶2. (C) Ambassador Eikenberry and Canadian Ambassador Bill Crosbie shared a frank exchange of views during a breakfast meeting at the U.S. Embassy on February 20. Ambassador Crosbie said that Canada is very concerned about the electoral reform process. He said they had not seen the copy of the final decree submitted to the Parliament on electoral reforms. Ambassador Eikenberry explained the key issues: conflicting Constitutional process issues (no action allowed the year of an election but requirement to act on emergency decrees within 30 days); the lack of a specific mention of an ISAF or coalition role in the vetting process; and the proposed formula of two of five ECC members being internationals appointed by UNAMA (either South African judge, Bangladeshi expert or Palestinian expert are the likely choices).

¶3. (C) Ambassador Crosbie told the Ambassador that getting this right is a bottom line issue for the Canadians. He was emotional, saying the issue makes my blood boil, as he described the Canadian view that the international community must stand up for the silent majority or be blamed for letting Karzai and his family establish across the country the system of patronage and control that exists in Kandahar. We must be prepared for confrontation with Karzai on this issue, he said, or risk losing credibility among our own population if we go along with a rigged election. He argued that a new generation of Afghans is working to run for Parliament and they are watching to see if the electoral changes will happen. We can't be seen to collude with it, he said. He argued that we need to give the Afghans looking to make a difference space to speak out and be able to turn

the course of their country.

¶4. (C) Ambassador Eikenberry questioned Canada's assessment, noting that Afghans will not stand up publicly to support a dominant international role in their election process, regardless of what might be said privately. The reality, he said, is that leaders like Abdullah and Mirwais Yasini are not interested in reform but rather their own political interests and alliances in Parliament. He cautioned that if we dig ourselves deeper into Afghan politics, we'll entrench ourselves deeper into the country with fewer options. We need to focus on what is good enough while still supporting key institutions.

¶5. (C) Crosbie conceded these points, but said we cannot go backwards in terms of the last election. Ambassador Eikenberry agreed, noting that having less Coalition/international ownership of the election is also a measure of progress. We need to focus, he said, on strategic options rather than being mired in Afghan politics. For example, increasing the competence and level of the ANA and ANP are clear priorities, and we must avoid losing the coming spring and summer mired in election reform issues. Ambassador Crosbie did not dispute this, but said that for Canada a red-line has to be ensuring improvements over the last election.

Kandahar

¶6. (C) Crosbie said we need to have a discussion in Kabul to complement work in Kandahar by the Canadians, the NATO ISAF

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RC-South Commander, and the Senior Civilian Representative for the South. He said we need to get discussion organized for addressing power brokers (Note: A discussion was started during a meeting held at the Canadian Embassy two weeks ago attended by Ambassador Wayne, the UK, Netherlands, Australia, and the NATO ISAF IJC. End Note.). The strategy, he said, must address how we manage malign actors and improve the management of contracts.

¶7. (C) They also discussed the proposals to realign the reporting structures of the Canadian-led PRT in Kandahar. Crosbie said that Canada is willing to be integrated into a new organization and won't stand on form. He agreed with the objective to bring coherence and integration of all civilians in Kandahar. While he has not talked yet to Ottawa about these issues, he believes that the following changes will be acceptable: 1) Canada will continue to lead the PRT, with the U.S. serving in the Deputy role (co-leads don't work, he said); 2) the PRT will report to RC-South as opposed to Task Force Kandahar; 3) civilians will report up the civilian chain, which they view at the RC-South level as the U.S. Senior Civilian Representative Frank Ruggiero -- he proposed dual-hatting Ruggiero to be both a U.S. and ISAF SCR; 4) the Representative of Canada in Kandahar (RoCK) and the PRT head should be me
Ambassador to Argentina will be the next senior Canadian and will be based at the PRT; and 5) Canada will place more civilians at the PRT to enhance integration, but he understands that the U.S. will lead the effort in certain areas/districts where U.S. resources are focused.

¶8. (C) Ambassador Eikenberry said he too was flexible on how to reorganize and believed that we have reasonable structures in the South and East. He also strongly endorsed the concept of RC-West and RC-North adopting the same model. While we're putting a lot of resources in the South and East, he said, the system needs to work regardless of whether there is an American flag. It's a mistake for NATO to see the Afghan issues only through the prism of the military; the SCR structures need to be enhanced. Ideally, the Spanish and Italians would create a regional SCR in the West, and the Scandinavians and Germans would create one in the North. He

also encouraged Crosbie to consider placing Canadian civilians at Regional Platform-South. SCR Ruggiero would mix them into his staff, he said, which would ensure greater coordination. Crosbie promised to review this and thought it probably made sense. He also noted that additional Canadians will go to Kandahar in March to support the civ-mil planning activity underway for governance and development in the wake of the upcoming military operations in Kandahar.

Strategy in the South and Impact on Overall Effort

¶9. (C) Crosbie said that Canada is comfortable with the overall strategy in Kandahar, which envisions additional pressure and activity in Kandahar in April-May. He said the police mentoring by U.S. Army Military Police and Canadian police, who live and work with the ANP in their district police stations, has proved effective. This effort is contributing to the sense of Afghan authority expanding in the city, he said, although he noted that it is proving difficult in Dand district where there are continued IEDs and security issues. Still, there's a sense we're on the right path, he said.

¶10. (C) Ambassador Eikenberry noted that the efforts in Helmand and the troop surge generally are intended to reverse the malaise and enhance the confidence of the Afghan leaders. He recounted a recent meeting with Abdullah Abdullah in which he described his perceptions of better security from a year ago. The operation in Helmand, Abdullah said, is not yet getting the national effects but it could when the ANA and ANP officers return to their homes and share accounts of their operations. Similarly, Abdullah said that the security in Kunduz is much better than six months ago. The jury is still out on whether current coalition efforts will work, but if Karzai becomes more confident and the government has the space to focus on sustainable national governance, there will be progress. A key problem, though, is the limited human capacity in most ministries and at the provincial and district level, Ambassador Eikenberry said. He noted the Embassy is working on a cable to better outline the limits of Afghan (and even U.S.) capacity to accomplish the strategies we have laid out. For example, the Minister of Agriculture is really only about one-two staff deep and he relies heavily on foreign advisors.

¶11. (C) Crosbie agreed, citing the example of ANP literacy.

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We're never going to make them literate but can make them literate enough. He cited two examples of progress: 1) in Kandahar, some police are starting to at least be able to read license plates when investigating cases; and 2) in a recent customs officer training, the officers at least acknowledged corruption exists and that it's wrong, which he said is not the case in many third world countries. Crosbie said that we'll win when the Afghans have confidence they can run this country, but we can't get too dug into supporting Karzai; it's critical we build support for others. Crosbie said he has a sinking feeling whether Karzai is actually in control, or whether it's his brothers and other advisers who are running him.

¶12. (C) Ambassador Eikenberry agreed and said that while we support efforts to press him to be a more visible Commander and Chief and push him to get outside of the Palace, we need to avoid self-delusion that he is really stepping up to lead the country and embrace mutual strategic goals until he clearly does so of his own volition. As the meeting ended, Crosbie mentioned the former ANA senior command and former Kandahar Governor General Raufi (Note: He served as Governor from August 2008 - December 2008 before being sacked reportedly for taking on Karzai's half brother and Kandahar powerbroker Ahmed Wali Karzai (AWK)) and noted that he would be a good person to use in a position of interest. Ambassador Eikenberry said he knew him and agreed he could

contribute in a positive way.
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